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DISPATCH NO. QITA-537

BGFINESE

AIR
(SPECIFY AIR OR SEA POUCH)**SECRET**
CLASSIFICATION

DATE: 1 October 1954

: Chief, WE

VIA []

DM : Chief of Station, []

SUBJECT: GENERAL— SHAM/OBOPUS/OBVERSE/INTEL

SPECIFIC— Debriefing of Kol Cuni

F: TRIE-2485 dtd 8 September 1954

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
SOURCE METHODS EXEMPTION 3828
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
DATE 2008

Kol Cuni, an Albanian, arrived in Trieste from Yugoslavia on 31 August 1954 in possession of a Yugoslav travel permit valid for travel to Trieste. Cuni, the son of Sokol and Suta Premissi, was born in Shkoder, Albania, on 15 December 1915. A clerk, he is single and a member of the Roman Catholic Church. He remained in Trieste until 9 September 1954 at which time he was taken across the FTT-Italian border by Jastrow to Cervignano, Italy, where he was placed on a train bound for Rome.

Cuni was debriefed by [] during the period 31 August - 8 September 1954. [] did not take notes during the debriefing and, as is evident from an examination of the information provided, Cuni seemed to avoid giving anything but general information on his activities during the last five years. [] states that Cuni at times actually attempted to avoid certain subjects of intelligence interest and always succeeded in keeping the discussion on general topics. [] is a personal friend of Cuni and the entire debriefing was conducted in an atmosphere of friendly discussion rather than an actual interrogation, which was in line with [] position and Cuni's ties with the Italian services.

Cuni was recruited for a mission into Albania by Italian Naval Intelligence during the early part of 1949. He was one of a number of Albanians taken from Italian refugee camps and sent to the Island of Montecristo for training in clandestine operations. None of the Albanians were permitted to leave the Island during the training period; however, on one occasion Cuni and Alush Lleshanaka, another trainee, were permitted one short trip to Rome. During the training period Cuni noticed a certain amount of political speculation on the part of the directors of the (Bloku Kombetar Independent) (BXI) because Leo Koliqi, the brother of Professor Ernest Koliqi, and Caf Beg Vlora were included in the training group although it was known a priori that they would never actually take part in the mission to Albania. Both Koliqi and Vlora were paid even though they were not active.

Approximately 20 Albanians took part in the training program. Cuni could only recall the names of Alush Lleshanaka, Zef Luka, Gjon Gjinaj, Gjon Melyshi, and Pasko Letaj. Among the instructors Cuni recalls Italian Major De Angelis (fnu) who taught map-reading and was known as a veteran

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parachutist. Both Cuni and Lleshanaka were given special training in radio transmission. During the training period members of the group received pay at the rate of 30,000 lire per month which was later increased to 60,000 lire per month. In addition, the group received food, clothing and board. The agreement with the Italians provided that members of the group would continue to receive 60,000 lire monthly even when they were on the mission in Albania and, in case of death, the money would be given to the family of the deceased.

5. Shortly before the group left for Albania an incident between Cuni and members of the EKI (in the person of Dr. Ismajl Verlaci, Professor Ernest Koliqi and Gjor Markagjoni) occurred when Cuni insisted on being told whether or not the Americans were involved in the mission. Cuni had repeatedly been told that the Americans were participating but since he had not seen any American representative during the training period he doubted whether the Americans had knowledge of the mission. Cuni stated that he would not go through with it unless he was assured that the American services were included. Matters took a turn for the worse when Verlaci refused to clarify the nature of American participation. Cuni goes so far as to state that the EKI considered executing him for desertion but Cuni was saved through the intervention of a high official of Italian Naval Intelligence, Negro (fnu), who informed Cuni that the American services were well briefed on the mission and were also included in it.
6. Before leaving for Albania, the nine members of Cuni's group (names not given) attended church services conducted by a major in the Italian Chaplain Corps. All of the group were members of the Roman Catholic Church. Present at the church services were Count Carobio (fnu) and Commandante Beltrame (fnu) both officials of Italian Naval Intelligence, who commanded the operation once it entered Albania.
7. Each member of the group was issued cold weather clothing, a machine gun, a Beretta pistol, hand grenades, compasses, Zeiss binoculars, a Rolex watch and a pup tent. The group was also given 300 gold napoleons. The group commanded by Cuni left Rome aboard a tri-motor military airplane at 1635 hours on 28 December 1949. Count Carobio was also aboard the plane and he accompanied the men as far as the jumping-off point. The group jumped at approximately 1915 hours and landed in an area approximately 15 kilometers northwest of Rukes, slightly off the target area. Cuni himself landed on a tree and spent almost two hours freeing himself. In the meanwhile the members of the group were scattered over the entire area and did not manage to regroup until 2300 hours of the same day after having fired a number of pistol shots to locate each other. The first night was spent walking towards Dardhe. The first radio communication with the Naval Ministry in Rome was made on 29 December 1949. Subsequently Cuni transmitted twice daily as ordered. The group was supplied by frequent parachute drops. Cuni recalls that on one occasion a package was lost containing a thousand gold napoleons.

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Approximately one month after arrival in Albania one of Cuni's men, Nikol (Inu), who was approximately 23 years of age and a native of Bregu Nates, Albania, attempted to surrender to the Albanian police. Nikol left the main group in an attempt to reach an Albanian police station but was discovered by Cuni before he could do so. Nikol was extremely nervous and stated that he could not continue with the mission and that he wanted to turn himself in to the Sigurimat. Cuni took no action against Nikol because he felt sorry for him and he forgave him.

Contact was established with the Albanian resistance group in the Puka and Mirdita area approximately two months after Cuni's arrival in Albania. Among Cuni's contacts in the resistance group was Hil Shllaku. Shllaku provided valuable military information to Cuni's group, which information he formerly received from Mark Shllaku (not related) who is presently residing in Shkoder. In early 1951 Hil Shllaku crossed the Albanian border into Yugoslavia. Two months after Hil Shllaku escaped to Yugoslavia he re-entered Albania on an intelligence mission for UDB and contacted Cuni. Shllaku had in his possession various Yugoslav propaganda material for distribution in Albania. Cuni was disappointed with Shllaku's mission for the UDB and told him so. Shllaku replied that he had been forced to undertake the mission. According to Cuni, Shllaku is a very capable and courageous individual whose only weakness is his love of money, for which he would risk everything.

The day before Ash Wednesday of 1950, Cuni received a radio message from someone advising him that Alush Lleshanaka and his group were to be dropped in the vicinity of Cuni's area on the next day. Cuni was instructed to mark the landing spot by lighting four large bonfires. On Ash Wednesday Cuni learned that Nikol had again left the group, this time with 15 gold Napoleons, with the intention of reaching Sigurimat. Since Nikol knew of Lleshanaka's arrival Cuni feared that Nikol would inform the Sigurimat; therefore Cuni radioed Rome in an attempt to delay the drop. Since this was not possible, Cuni transferred the drop zone to an area near Honelle. After Cuni learned from his informants that Nikol had passed through the villages of Puka, Vaudajes and Giader, crossing the Drin River by raft with the help of a local villager to whom he paid one gold Napoleon. This person, who was actually a Sigurimat agent and was suspicious of the gold Napoleon, reported the incident to Sigurimat which started a search of the area, arrested Nikol and took him to Tirana. Cuni is certain that Nikol did not inform the Sigurimat about the mission since there were no repercussions as a result of his arrest. According to information Cuni received from Yugoslavia one year ago, Nikol is still in a Tirana prison.

Lleshanaka's team arrived on Ash Wednesday with no trouble. The team was to operate in the Elbasan area. Cuni met Lleshanaka approximately seven days after the latter arrived and, after a short stay with Cuni, Lleshanaka and his group left for Elbasan. The aircraft carrying the

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Lleshanaka group also brought a supply of food which was dropped a short distance away from the area signalled by Cuni. Several of the group were watched to recover the packages. In a fight which ensued between the group and police agents, two of Cuni's men and seven police agents were killed.

Lleshanaka operated in the Elbasan area and maintained radio contact with Cuni almost on a daily basis. Approximately three months after the arrival of Lleshanaka's group, his radio failed and Lleshanaka personally went to Elbasan to obtain spare parts. On the Elbasan-Puka road he met Cuni, who dissuaded him against going to Elbasan and made arrangements to provide the spare parts. Approximately one month later Lleshanaka was killed in a skirmish with Sigurimit agents. One day during a normal patrol by Cuni in this area he ran across a person who admitted being a Sigurimit informant. Cuni's mission to discover anti-Communist activities in the mountain areas. The group decided to execute him on the spot; however, by some strange turn of events off the mountains (Kamuni Lek Dukagjinit) the person was spared after he had sworn that he would never again engage in any political activity. Cuni is convinced that the person kept his word and never reported the group's presence in the zone.

In 1950 Cuni established contact with three schoolteachers in the vicinity of Puka for the purpose of soliciting information of an economic nature from them. Cuni mentioned the name of only one of the teachers, Egl Ndoja. The other two agreed to provide information. Cuni received valuable information which he transmitted to Rome and which he later learned was printed in an article published by the Mercury Press Agency in April 1952 under the heading "An Inquiry on Albania." The Mercury Press Agency is located at Via di Ripetta, Rome. Its director is Massimo Uffreduzzi and its editor is Nino Rodice.

In 1950 Cuni met Pasko Suma, an anti-Communist operating in the Mirdita Zone. Suma, a youth of 26 years, had been operating in that area for several years and was considered one of the most active in the resistance movement and one of the most feared by the communists. He had joined the fight against the communists in order to vindicate the death of his father and five brothers. He was said to have killed more than 200 communists. Suma was later killed in a fight with approximately 300 police agents. Suma's name is very popular in the Mirdita Zone and he is considered a martyr for the anti-communistic cause.

Italian radio support for the team was excellent. One radio message received from Rome, which particularly impressed Cuni, was a message from the Naval Ministry which informed Cuni of an incident which had occurred at Puka only 24 hours previous. The message stated that Pal Bili Mirakaj and seven Albanians had broken into and robbed a State Cooperative Store at Puka and were now proceeding to a mountain hide-out not far from Cuni.

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Rome asked Cuni to contact them, which Cuni managed to do. However, it was not until approximately two months later, due to the heavy police activity in the Mirdita zone. During the early part of 1951, Cuni received radio communications from Rome asking whether or not he was acquainted with a certain Albanian from Shkoder who attended the University of Trieste, received a degree in political science in 1944, was married and had one child (AICOMB believes the radio message referred to him). Rome also inquired on the identity of an Albanian from Shkoder who resided in Trieste, then moved to Genoa and later to Rome. This person's brother was a shoemaker in Shkoder (AICOMB believes the message refers to Kol Nogaj who is presently residing in New Haven, Connecticut). The same message was repeated for four days and although Cuni knew the answer he reported negatively to both questions. Cuni still cannot guess the significance of the two questions as they were completely out of context and apparently were asked for no reason.

Cuni stated that today the Albanian anti-communist resistance movement can be considered as a minor force. The communists have kept a close watch on even the smallest nucleus of potential anti-communists and take immediate steps to neutralize them whether they are of an internal nature or infiltrated into Albania from another country. Drastic steps have been taken against anyone assisting the anti-communist resistance groups; the harboring of an anti-communist is a crime punishable by immediate execution of the entire family of the person involved.

The main difficulty encountered by the anti-communist resistance forces is the lack of food and arms and also the lack of support from the population who fear the reprisals of the communist authorities. Cuni estimated that approximately 400 persons were arrested during the three years he was in Albania as a direct result of their having had contact with Cuni and his group. When Cuni arrived in Albania the resistance movement in the Mirdita/Dukagjini area numbered over 100 persons. Today Cuni believes that that number has been reduced to less than 30 persons. It is more difficult to conduct clandestine activities now than it was in 1945.

The population is willing to support a large-scale operation with the mission of liberating Albania, but on the other hand the people are afraid to support small scale, harassing-type operations for fear of reprisals. Cuni stated that the people want a Western liberation and, rather than be subject to a liberation by Yugoslavia, they prefer to remain under the present regime.

In 1954, in order to combat the infiltration of Yugoslav teams into Albania, the Albanian Government decided to issue arms to selected persons in the mountainous areas of Malciza, Kacbe, Dukagjini and Mirdita. This move had a favorable psychological effect on the people since they felt they were contributing towards the defense of Albania against the Yugoslavs.

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Cuni states that his mission was able to remain in Albania for such a long period due to the following factors:

- a. The support given to Cuni's group by Pal Bib Mirakaj with his numerous faithful friends.
- b. The large amount of money spent by the group in Albania. As an example, Cuni cited the case of one family in the vicinity of Iballe which received more than 500 gold napoleons for selling food and clothing to the group.
- c. The cold-blooded courage of the members of the group.
- d. The group's hope of eventually escaping to Greece or Italy rather than by way of Yugoslavia.
- e. The group operated only in the most difficult terrain in the Iballe, Dardhe, Monedhe and Puka areas.

When Cuni decided to cross the border into Yugoslavia, he sent Pal Bib Mirakaj to contact UDB in Gjakova to explain Cuni's position and to determine what treatment the UDB would give to Cuni and his group after crossing into Yugoslavia. Mirakaj spoke to a UDB Major Kapllari (fmu) who assured the former that Cuni's group would be granted political asylum with all rights as political refugees. Prior to leaving Albania, Cuni told Rose of his decision and received permission to do so from Rome with instructions to bury the group's radio in the Monedhe zone at the mouth of the Drin River without telling the other members of the mission. Cuni did as instructed, telling the others that he had destroyed the radio and thrown it into the river.

Cuni crossed the Yugoslav border near Gjakova in May or June 1951. He was accompanied by 25 armed men and four women, one of whom was Farife Haveriqi. In Yugoslavia, Cuni and the group were treated well but isolated from other Albanians for the first several months. During his confinement in Yugoslavia members of Cuni's group were almost completely forgotten by the Italians and they received only a few clothing parcels from Italy.

In 1952, Cuni attempted to send a report on Albanian activities in Yugoslavia to the Italians and selected Qazim Gojani, a declared anti-communist and intimate friend of Kol Bib Mirakaj, who resided in Rome to act as the courier. Cuni trusted Gojani, who was ostensibly a businessman and who had lent Cuni and others of his group more than 200,000 dinars. Cuni gave Gojani a report which the latter was to send to Kol Bib Mirakaj. However, Cuni learned that the report was given by Gojani to Colonel Gato Mijovic, chief of UDB Albanian operations. Obviously, Gojani was a UDB informant. Cuni was subsequently called by Mijovic and severely reprimanded for attempting to sneak the report out of Yugoslavia.

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• [] Comment: Cuni did not volunteer any information on his three-year stay in Yugoslavia and he was not pressed on this point.

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Distribution:

1 - Headquarters

2 - [] []

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